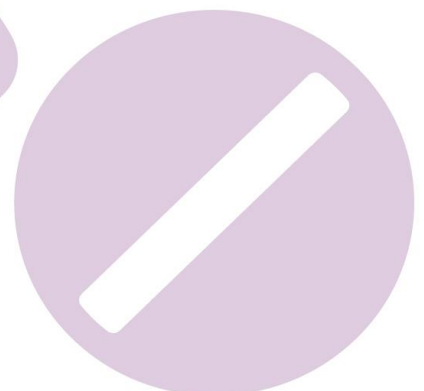
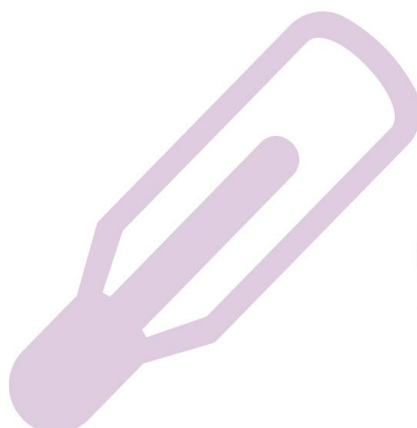


RCEM Winter Flow Project

Analysis of the data so far: 08 January 2021



Introduction

In 2015, we launched the 'Winter Flow Project' in an effort to highlight the difficulties facing an NHS struggling with unprecedented financial difficulties and insufficient resources.

The project looked at patient flow within Emergency Departments over the winter. It was a great success because of the generosity of its contributors, with over 50 NHS Trusts and Health Boards from across the UK submitting data over a six-month period. These data helped to provide a better understanding of system pressures and four-hour standard performance.

The findings enabled RCEM to broaden the debate around emergency medicine beyond the usual narrow focus on the four-hour standard and meant that providers, commissioners, the national press and governments in each of the four nations of the UK were better informed about the challenges faced by staff working on the NHS frontline.

The project has proven invaluable and is now in its fifth year. In our view, the project has also been instrumental in making the case for additional resources for the health sector; which is now reflected in the new settlement for the NHS which was announced as part of the NHS Long Term Plan

As part of this year's project, where possible, each participating Trust/Board has submitted a number of data points on a weekly basis. These include four-hour standard performance, the number of acute beds in service, the number of patients staying more than 12 hours in an Emergency Department from arrival to departure, and the number of patient attendances in their department(s). Additionally, some sites have been able to provide data on patients isolating in their EDs, as well as staff absences.

As has been the case in previous years the data is aggregated to ensure the focus of consideration is the wider health care system rather than the performance of individual Trusts/Boards. More than 40 sites have submitted this data on a weekly basis since the beginning of October.

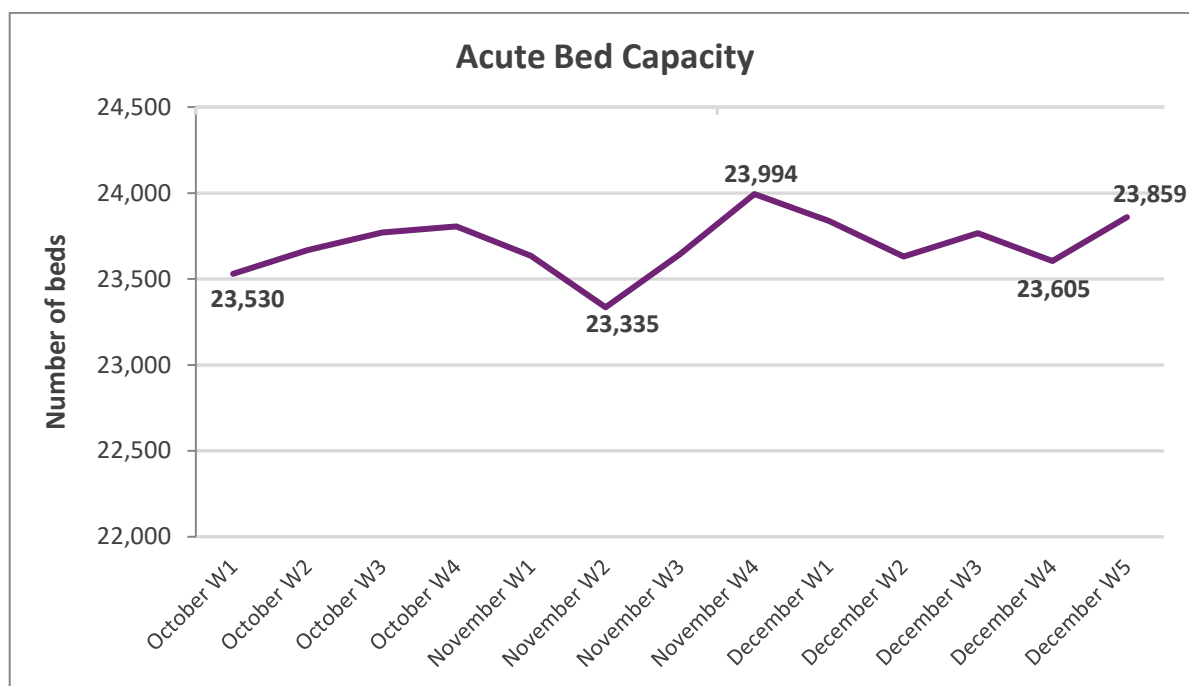
Published on a Friday of the week following data collection, the summary data provide a current overview of 'winter pressures'. The College is grateful to the participants who represent Trusts/Boards of all sizes and geographical locations.

Unlike NHS England datasets, there is no suggestion that our project represents a complete or permanent scrutiny of the healthcare system. Our data include all four countries of the UK though the majority of participating sites lie within England. It is just a sample of Trusts/Boards, albeit a large and representative one.

The data have already been of immense value to the College and allow informed comment and analysis rather than speculation.

The weekly data and trend data are presented in the following tables.

Graph of acute beds in service



Active Bed Management

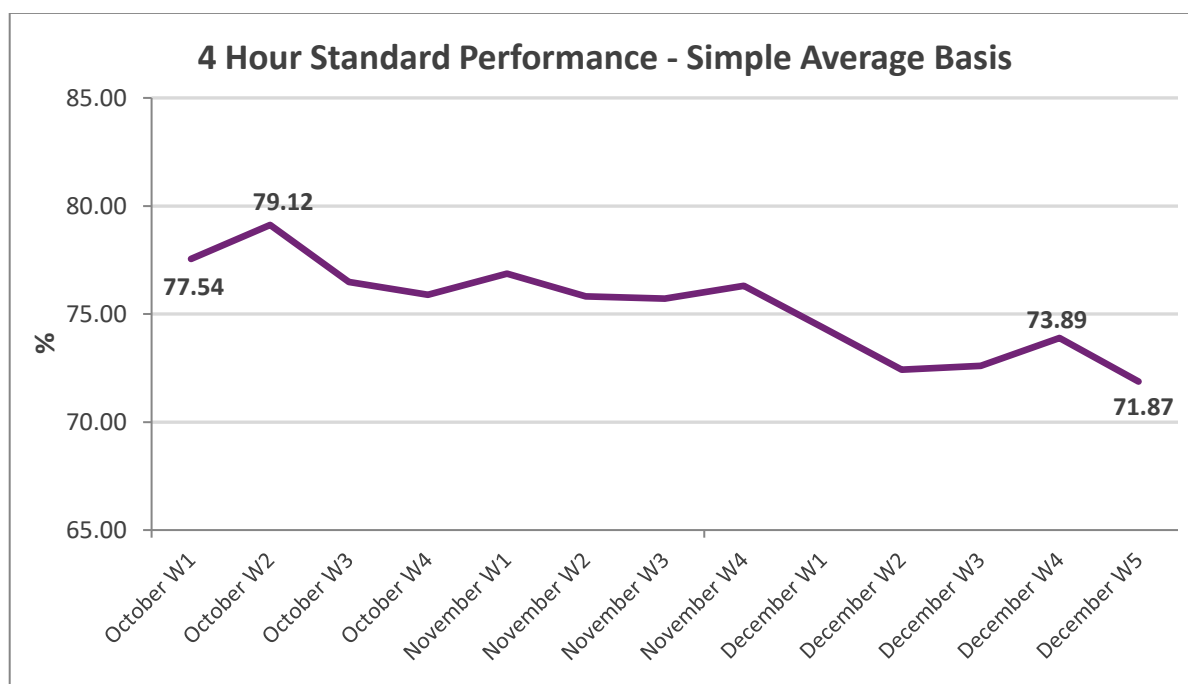
In the fifth week of December, the number of beds within the project group increased to 23,859 – up from 23,605 the previous week. This is a 1.08% increase from the previous week. In total, there has been a 1.93% increase in the aggregate bed stock¹ from the project starting point.

The extent to which the participating Trusts/Boards are adjusting their bed stock to meet demand is shown in the table below.

	No flexing	0 – 5%	5 – 10%	10 – 15%	15 – 20%
Number of sites	3	3	7	9	13

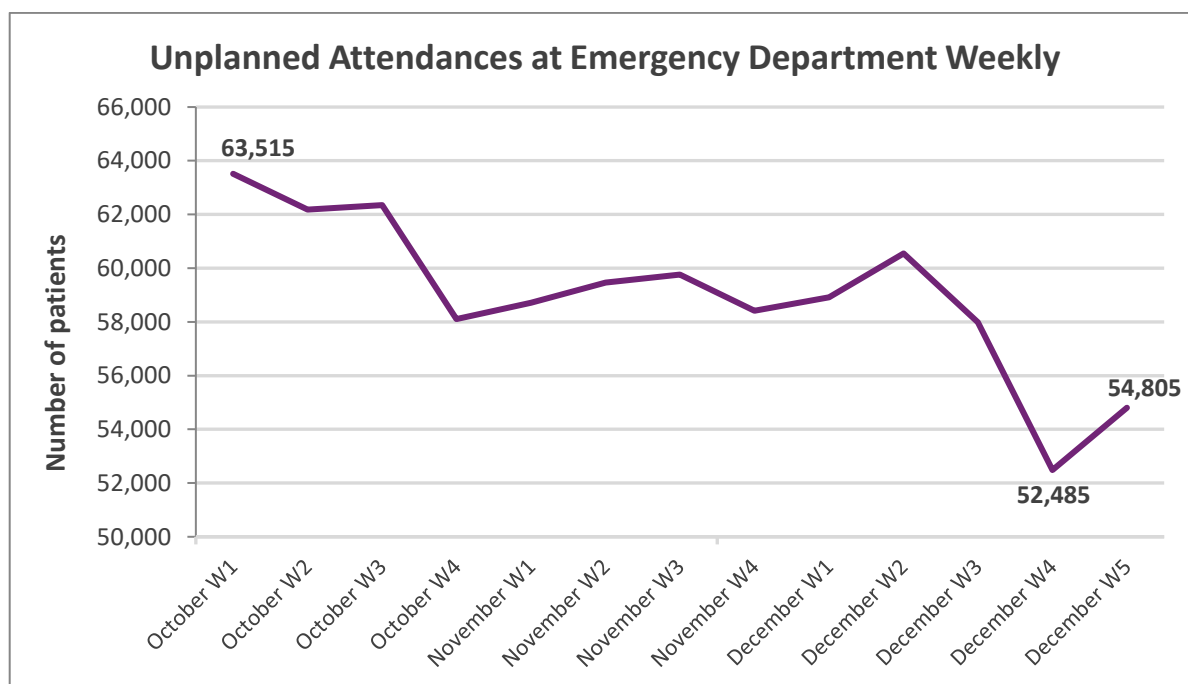
¹ This is measuring from week one to the maximum recorded bed stock for the project to date.
Published 08 January 2021

Graph of four-hour performance by week since October



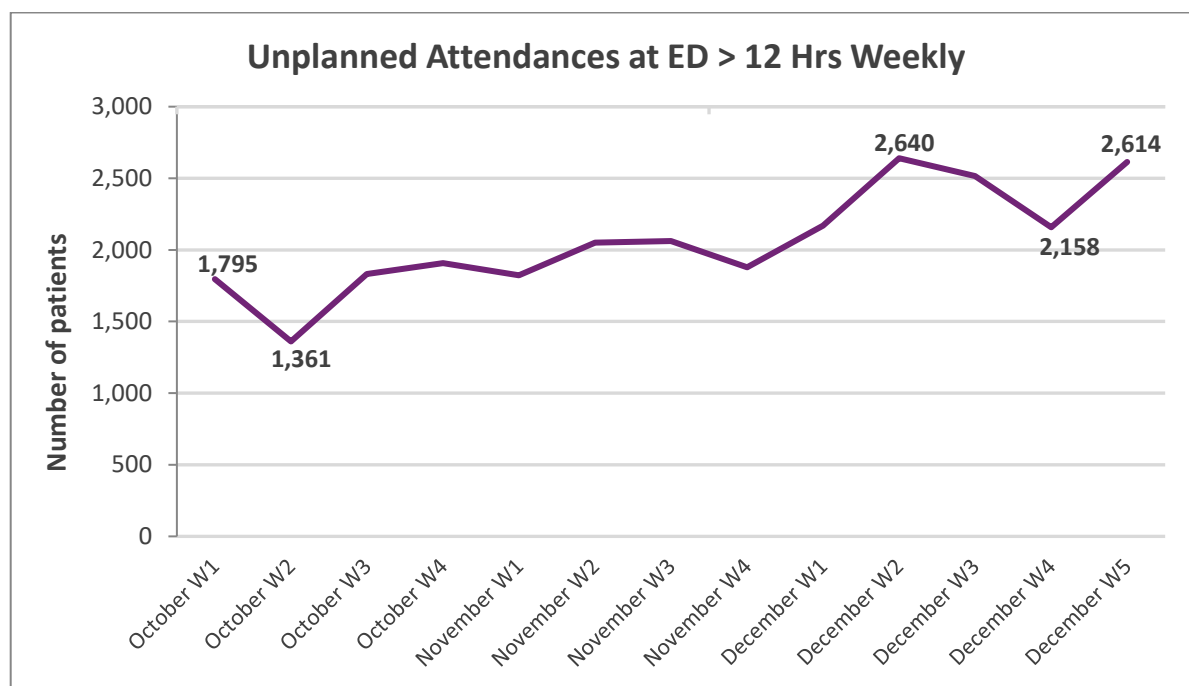
In the fifth week of December, four-hour standard performance stood at 71.87% - down from 73.89% the previous week. The underlying picture shows 4 increases and 19 decreases across the project group.

Graph of attendances since October



A total of 54,805 attendances were recorded within the Winter Flow group this week – up from 52,485 the previous week. This is an increase of 2,614 patients or 4.77%. At site level there were 21 recorded increases and 5 decreases from the previous week.

Graph of the number patients spending more than 12 hours in an Emergency Department from arrival to departure since October



In the fifth week of December, the number of patients staying more than 12 hours from arrival to departure in Emergency Departments within the Winter Flow group stood at 2,614, up from 2,158 the previous week. This was an increase of 21.14% from the previous week and translates to 4.77% of attendances recorded within the Winter Flow group in the same period. The Winter Flow Project has recorded 26,806 patients staying over 12 hours from arrival to departure in Emergency Departments since the first week of October.

Overall

While we may not yet have the national performance and demand figures from NHS England for December, the Winter Flow data from the previous few weeks give us a rough indication of what they're likely to say. Regrettably, all indications are that last month was an extremely difficult one for the NHS.

The last week of December (which crossed over into the first week of January) saw the worst performance against the four-hour standard, with trusts collectively admitting, seeing or discharging 71.87% of patients before the threshold. This is the worst performance so far this year, and while generally speaking Winter Flow sites have performed slightly better against this metric in this year's project, last week's figure was just 0.03 percentage points better than the same week in 2020, the smallest such difference so far this year.

Similarly, the 2,614 12-hour waits were the second largest figure in this year's project; this increase also took place against a backdrop of falling attendances, meaning that 4.77% of attendances at EDs ended in a wait of 12 or more hours. This is the highest figure so far this year. While trusts often see an improvement between weeks four and five of December due to a lull in activity around Christmas (last year there was an uptick of over four percentage

points), this year saw a deterioration instead, presumably in large part due to the heavy pressures wrought by COVID.

A similar story is undoubtedly unfolding across the NHS in the UK – [according to the HSJ](#), leaked data indicates that December will see a record number of 12-hour trolley waits. Sadiq Khan's recent decision to declare a major incident in London serves as a similar reminder of the dire situation facing the NHS. The College sends its best wishes to every health-service worker on the front line tackling the crisis, and hopes the situation will ameliorate soon.